



Connecticut  
Early Childhood  
Alliance

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee  
Re: Governor's Budget Proposal – Early Childhood  
Submitted by Maggie Adair, Executive Director  
Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance  
Tuesday, February 21, 2012

Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on the Governor's budget proposal for early childhood within the State Department of Education. I am Maggie Adair, Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide advocacy and membership organization committed to improving outcomes for all children, birth to age eight, in the areas of early learning, health, safety, and economic security.

The Alliance applauds the Governor for including significant investments in early care and education in this budget plan, and we urge the Appropriations Committee to support his vision. Specifically, the Governor proposes:

- \$4 million to create 500 preschool slots in priority school districts
- \$3 million for professional development for early childhood educators
- \$5 million in bonding for facility improvements and capital repairs at licensed early care and education centers
- \$5 million in bonding for design and implementation of a Tiered Quality Improvement Rating System (TQRIS)

The Governor also maintains funding for early childhood programs, including Child Care Services, School Readiness, Family Resource Centers, Parent Trust Fund, Community Plans for Early Childhood, Early Literacy, Head Start and Even Start. The Alliance urges the Committee to maintain programs at these funding levels.

The elements in the Governor's early childhood budget proposal are pieces to building a coordinated, aligned and consolidated early childhood system, birth to age eight. To ensure the pieces of this system fit seamlessly together, the legislature enacted P.A. 11-181 – *An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education and the Establishment of a Coordinated System of Early Care and Education and Child Development* last session. This legislation sets in motion a process to tie the many components of early childhood services together and calls for hiring a planning director, half-funded by philanthropy, to build such a system. The Alliance urges quick action by the state to hire a planning director and get the work underway.

**Slot Expansion.** There is a great unmet need for early care and education slots for low-income children across the state. The Governor makes a solid down payment by funding 500 new School Readiness slots in the Priority School Districts. The State Department of Education estimates that the total number of children not being served in the 19 priority school districts is 6,900, of which 5,597 would seek center-based space. The balance, according to the SDE report,



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would seek other types of care such as family day care or family, friend, and neighbor. Keep in mind that this SDE number only pertains to the 19 priority school districts – it does not factor in the need in the competitive school districts and the rest of the state. Poverty and the achievement gap exist in every community in Connecticut. We must be mindful that there are many children in all communities who do not have affordable access to quality early care and education. The Governor's investment is a great step forward and is a targeted approach to address the achievement gap in our poorest communities.

**Professional Development.** Professional development is critical to moving the early care workforce forward, increasing the educational level of teachers, and recruiting and retaining staff. The Alliance recommends that new funding for professional development include a mix of scholarships, tuition reimbursement, and training and support for family day care providers and family, friend and neighbor providers. Scholarships and tuition reimbursement are essential so that early care educators – *who one of the lowest paid workers, according by the Department of Labor database* – can afford to attend college and secure a degree. P.A. 11-54 requires that 50% of all head teachers have an associate's degree and 50% have a bachelor's degree by 2015, and that 100% of teachers have a bachelor's degree by 2020. Given the low salaries of early childhood teachers, this goal will only be attainable if the state provides financial assistance to this workforce. The number of early childhood teachers who apply for scholarships and those that receive them through Connecticut Charts-A-Course attests to the demand for higher education opportunities among early childhood teachers.

Just as important is providing training and support to those who care for a majority of our youngest – infants and toddlers. Mounds of brain research demonstrate that learning begins at birth. From birth, all children need language-rich, developmentally-appropriate, stimulating environments that encourage brain development, language, early literacy skills, and social-emotional competence. This is the foundation for strong academic achievement. By age 3, the brain has reached 80% of its complete growth and has made more than 1 trillion neuron connections. The earliest years are the most vital and what happens during that time can alter the path to success. Investing in providers caring for our youngest children is imperative to ensure children are ready for preschool so that they can flourish in kindergarten and succeed in learning and in life.

**Facilities Improvement.** The Governor's investment in facilities improvement and repairs is long over-due. There will be an obvious need to open 500 new School Readiness slots. We must also maintain and upgrade our existing centers. The Alliance recommends that bonding be moved from the SDE line item to the CHEFA line item.

**Tiered Quality Improvement Rating System.** As the Governor's budget plan notes, one reason Connecticut did not win Race to the Top – Early Challenge Funding was the lack of a TQRIS, which is in place in many other states. But beyond the federal competition, a TQRIS is needed so that early childhood settings have guidelines to help them improve quality and so that parents have access to information about the quality of early care settings as they make choices for their child.



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The Governor's plan also transfers the Charts-A-Course program from DSS to SDE. This shift follows moving the DSS State-Funded Child Care Centers to SDE in the 2011 legislative session. These shifts are part of an effort to align early childhood programs as part of a comprehensive and coordinated system. We believe that we are most likely to achieve a functioning early care and education system if all of the elements of such a system are designed and/or reformed pursuant to a coordinated plan, rather than developed piecemeal. We continue to support P.A. 11-181 and reiterate our hope that the planning director whom it calls for (a position half-funded by philanthropy) will be hired quickly.

In closing, the Governor has made significant strides in his budget proposal to help close the achievement gap by investing in the early years of a child's development. The Alliance urges the Appropriations Committee to support the Governor's early childhood funding plan. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.